Supreme Court, U.S.
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No.

In The Supreme Court
OF THE
United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1991

THE HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA, Individually and d/b/a GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES,
Petitioner,

v.

R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY, Deceased,
Respondent.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the Supreme Court of Georgia

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

(1) Whether, in reaffirming an award of punitive damages in the sum of $1.3 million, the Supreme Court of Georgia complied with the mandate of this Court to reconsider its affirmance of that award in light of *Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company v. Haslip*, 499 U.S. (1991), or whether that court decided this federal question in a way that conflicts with an applicable decision of this Court, namely *Pacific Mutual v. Haslip*.

(2) Whether Official Code of Georgia Annotated Section 51-12-5 (1982), which authorizes punitive damages to be awarded in tort actions "in which there are aggravating circumstances, in either the act or the intention," violates the Due Process Clause or the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, in that, among other things:

(a) It fails to provide adequate notice of the conduct for which punitive damages may be allowed;

(b) It fails to set forth any clear, constitutionally acceptable standards for juries to apply in determining whether to award punitive damages;

(c) It fails to set forth any clear, constitutionally acceptable standards for juries to apply in determining the amount of such damages; and

(d) It fails to protect defendants subject to punitive damages in civil cases in a manner constitutionally consistent with the protections provided under the criminal laws to criminal defendants subject to fines (e.g., notice of the prohibited conduct, upper limit of

criminal fine specified by law, protection against double jeopardy).*

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* All parties to this case are named in the caption except Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., the owner/operator of the helicopter which crashed. Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., paid $10,001 ($5,001 nominal and $5,000 punitive damages) into the registry of the trial court and did not appeal to the Supreme Court of Georgia from the trial court's judgment. It, therefore, has no interest in the outcome of this petition. Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., has, however, been given notice pursuant to Rule 29.3. Because 28 U.S.C. § 2403(b) may be applicable to this case, the Attorney General of Georgia has also been served with copies of this Petition.

Pursuant to Rule 29.1 of the Rules of this Court, the following constitutes a list of all parent companies, non-wholly owned subsidiaries, and affiliates of petitioner: the Gwinnett Hospital System Foundation, Inc., and its subsidiary, Gwinnett Service Corporation, Inc.

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R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate
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PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF GEORGIA

This is the second appearance of this case before this Court.

The petitioner, the Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, Georgia, individually, and d/b/a Gwinnett Ambulance Services, respectfully petitions the Court for writ of certiorari to review the judgment and opinion of the Supreme Court of Georgia entered on October 18, 1991 (reconsideration denied, November 1, 1991), following the remand of this case from this Court to the Supreme Court of Georgia (see No. 89-1315) for further consideration in light of *Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Co. v. Haslip*, 499 U.S. (1991).

Opinions Below

The opinion of the Supreme Court of Georgia following remand is reported at 261 Ga. 613, 409 SE2d 501 (1991), and is reproduced in the Appendix, beginning at A.1. The order denying reconsideration of that opinion appears in the Appendix at A.6.

The original opinion of the Supreme Court of Georgia, as to which this Court granted certiorari and remanded in No. 89-1315, is reported at 259 Ga. 759, 386 S.E.2d 120 (1989), and is reproduced in the Appendix beginning at A.7. The order denying reconsideration of that opinion appears in the Appendix at A.19. The judgment of the State Court of Cobb County dated September 27, 1988, is unreported but is reproduced in the Appendix at A.20.

Jurisdictional Statement

This Court's jurisdiction over this case was recognized in *Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, Georgia, v. R. Stanford Jones*, No. 89-1315, 499 U.S. (1991). It has never been questioned. Moreover, this Court has jurisdiction to enforce its orders, particularly its order entered March 18, 1991, remanding this case for further consideration in light of *Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Co. v. Haslip*, 499 U.S. (1991).

The judgment and opinion sought to be reviewed were rendered by the Supreme Court of Georgia on October 18, 1991. That court subsequently denied petitioner's motion for reconsideration on November 1, 1991.

Jurisdiction to review the decision of the Supreme Court of Georgia by writ of certiorari is conferred upon this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1257(a). This petition for writ of certiorari is filed within ninety days of the denial of petitioner's motion for reconsideration by the Supreme Court of Georgia, as allowed under 28 U.S.C. § 2101(c) and Rule 13.4 of the Supreme Court Rules.

Constitutional and Statutory Provisions Involved

This suit challenges the constitutionality of Section 51-12-5 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (1982) (O.C.G.A.) which provided, at all times pertinent to this appeal, as follows:

> In a tort action in which there are aggravating circumstances, in either the act or the intention, the jury may give additional damages to deter the wrongdoer from repeating the trespass or as compensation for the wounded feelings of the plaintiff.

In addition, this case involves the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which provide in pertinent part as follows:

> [N]or shall any State deprive any person of ... property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Statement of the Case

1. *Summary of the Case.*

Petitioner seeks review on writ of certiorari of its contention that a judgment imposing $1,300,000 in punitive damages pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, *supra*, accompanied only by "nominal" damages ($5,001.00, levied jointly against petitioner and a co-defendant), has deprived and will deprive petitioner of substantial rights guaranteed by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as recognized in *Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Co. v. Haslip, supra.*

The constitutionality of the Georgia statute governing punitive damages and the $1.3 million punitive damages award entered in this case were properly raised in the courts of Georgia and were expressly reviewed and considered by the Supreme Court of Georgia in its decisions below (Appendix at A.1, A.7 at 17-18). In those decisions,

the court below upheld the Georgia statute and the punitive damages award in the face of petitioner's constitutional challenges.

2. *Presentation of Issues in the State Courts*

Petitioner's constitutional arguments were raised throughout the course of this case, beginning in the trial court as early as its amendment to answer and defenses (R.60-64, set forth in the Appendix, at A.22). Petitioner's pre-trial motion to dismiss or strike plaintiff's claim for punitive damages on the constitutional grounds (A.26) was overruled by the trial court (A.30). Nevertheless, petitioner incorporated all of its constitutional arguments when it moved for directed verdict at trial (A.32), and, in addition, objected to all the court's jury charges as to punitive damages (A.35). Following the jury's award of $5001 in nominal damages and $1.3 million in punitive damages, petitioner renewed its constitutional arguments in its motion for judgment notwithstanding the verdict or for new trial (A.36), which the trial court overruled notwithstanding the disparate amounts involved (A.41).

Petitioner's appeal to the Supreme Court of Georgia enumerated as error that Georgia's punitive damages statute, O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, *supra*, and the award in this case were unconstitutional as a denial of due process and equal protection under the U.S. Constitution (A.43). The Supreme Court of Georgia in its 1989 opinion specifically confronted the issue of whether the Georgia statute was constitutional under the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the state and federal constitutions and upheld both the statute and the excessive award in this case as constitutional. *See Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County v. Jones, supra* (A.12-18).

The constitutionality of the Georgia statute under the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses and the award entered in this case were, as demonstrated above, raised in the trial court. The constitutional issues were also recognized and determined by the highest court of the

state in its original opinion in this case and again in its opinion on remand. The federal question was, therefore, timely and properly raised so as to give this Court jurisdiction to review the judgment below.

3. *Material Facts.*

The facts material to this case, including all those relied upon by the Georgia Supreme Court, are as follows:

William H. O'Kelley, deceased, was mortally burned in a head-on car/truck collision in Gwinnett County, Georgia. Ambulances and a helicopter were called.

The senior EMT in charge at the scene, Ms. Beth Burgess, was an employee of Gwinnett Ambulance Services operated by the Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County. Mr. O'Kelley was placed in an ambulance, where Ms. Burgess examined his burns. After she attempted unsuccessfully to begin an IV, she decided to transport Mr. O'Kelley by ambulance to the closest hospital, Joan Glancy Hospital (operated by the Hospital Authority) (T. 317-318).

While the co-defendant's helicopter was in route to the accident site, the supervisor of Gwinnett Ambulance Services directed the emergency technicians at the scene to transport the patient to Joan Glancy Hospital, which was less than two miles from the accident scene (T. 15), and had on staff two physicians with significant training and experience in treating burn patients. One of these physicians, Dr. Gaskins, who was monitoring EMT radio transmissions, agreed with the decision to transport the patient to Joan Glancy (T. 549).

The helicopter was still about two to three minutes away when the ambulance left the scene for the trip to the hospital, which took about four minutes (T. 81, 91). The helicopter proceeded to Joan Glancy Hospital, where it landed safely in the parking lot.

Plaintiff introduced the testimony of a Gwinnett Fire Department dispatcher who testified to instances when a patient was not taken to the nearest emergency room (as was done here) but instead to one of the Hospital Authority's institutions. He further testified that the reason for bypassing nearer hospitals was to "provide more services to the county." (A.8.)

At the Joan Glancy emergency room, Mr. O'Kelley was treated and stabilized by Drs. Gaskins and Mason (the two experienced physicians referred to above), by the establishment of IV lines which the EMT had been unsuccessful in starting in the ambulance, administration of morphine, and placement of a respiratory tube in the patient's throat after he complained of shortness of breath about an hour after reaching the hospital.

Due to the severity of his injuries, the patient's chances of survival were about 1%. After being examined and x-rayed for the possibility of other injuries, about an hour and a half after arriving O'Kelley was strapped into a stretcher and loaded onto the helicopter, which was owned by a co-defendant, for evacuation to a hospital with a "burn unit" specializing in treatment of severely burned patients.

On lift-off from the hospital parking lot, the co-defendant's helicopter hit a light pole and crashed. Experts testified at trial that the accident was caused by "gross pilot error" (A.8; 259 Ga. at 760), not only for flying into the pole, but also because the water/alcohol tank, which may have been necessary to give added power to the helicopter engine for assent from such a confined space, was empty (Id.).

Incredibly, O'Kelley was only slightly injured, if at all, in the helicopter crash. After being re-examined at Joan Glancy emergency room, O'Kelley was then transported by ambulance to Grady Hospital's burn unit in Atlanta, where he died six days later as the result of his burns. The bill for services from Joan Glancy Hospital was $1,216.26.

The Administrator of O'Kelley's estate sued the owner of the helicopter and the Hospital Authority for nominal and punitive damages, but no claim for actual damages for personal injury or wrongful death was asserted. The driver of the car which caused the head-on collision and her employer were also sued in separate suits (A.7).

Plaintiff's counsel contended that punitive damages were warranted because the Hospital Authority allegedly was motivated by profit, rather than patient care, in taking Mr. O'Kelley to one of its hospitals, and the Hospital Authority failed to maintain a proper helicopter landing area. In its first opinion, however, the Supreme Court of Georgia observed that generally punitive damages are not authorized for non-performance of a duty and did not base its decision on the alleged failure to provide a proper landing area (A.11, n.7; 259 Ga. at 761, n. 7). (Thus it should be noted that petitioner's alleged conduct justifying punitive damages was not the proximate cause of the helicopter crash.)

The jury awarded O'Kelley's estate nominal damages of $5,001 against the Hospital Authority and the helicopter owner, jointly. Although the jury awarded punitive damages of $5,000 against the owner of the helicopter, it awarded $1.3 million in punitive damages against the Hospital Authority.

The Supreme Court of Georgia affirmed, but on petition for certiorari this Court vacated that judgment and remanded the case for further consideration in light of *Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Co. v. Haslip, supra. Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County v. Jones*, No. 89-1315, *supra*.

Argument: Reasons for Granting the Writ

1. *The Court Below Did Not Apply Pacific Mutual v. Haslip As Directed By This Court.*

This is one of several cases decided last March in which the Court granted certiorari, vacated the judgment and remanded for further consideration in light of *Pacific Mutual Life Ins. Co. v. Haslip*, 499 U.S. (1991).

On remand, the Supreme Court of Georgia misread this Court's *Haslip* decision. In *Haslip*, the Court found that the common law scheme for the allowance of punitive damages was not so inherently unfair as to be *per se* unconstitutional (111 S.Ct. at 1043). However, the Court went on to conclude that the punitive damages award in a particular case could be so excessive as to deprive a person of property without due process, but that under the procedures being utilized in Alabama the award in *Haslip* did not violate due process.

Of crucial significance here, however, this Court found that "The Alabama Supreme Court's post-verdict review ensures that punitive damages awards are not grossly out of proportion to the severity of the offense and have some understandable relationship to compensatory damages" (111 S.Ct. at 1045).

Unlike Alabama, Georgia's post-verdict review does not ensure that punitive damages awards have some understandable relationship to compensatory damages. On the contrary, in its prior opinion in this case the Supreme Court of Georgia acknowledged that "this award appears to bear no rational relationship to the extent of the injury . . .", saying that lack of such rational relationship was of "no consequence", and holding that the "concept of proportionality as a legal limitation on the amount of punitive damages" is inapplicable in Georgia when such damages are awarded for deterrence (A.11; 259 Ga. at 762).

Notwithstanding this Court's determination that punitive damage awards must have some understandable relationship to compensatory damages, on remand the Georgia Supreme Court disagreed, saying "... we reject[ ] the notion that punitive damages must necessarily bear some relationship to the *actual* damages awarded by the jury." (A.2) (The phrases "compensatory damages" and "actual damages" have the same meaning.)

The Georgia court found that comparing the punitive award to the actual award was not mandated by this Court in *Haslip* because this Court there approved the Alabama review standards which include "whether there is a reasonable relationship between the punitive damages award and harm likely to result from the defendant's conduct as well as the harm that actually has occurred" (A.2 quoting from *Haslip*, 111 S.Ct. at 1045). Because in another case the defendant's alleged policy of bypassing emergency care at nearby hospitals could result in great harm to a patient, the Georgia court found that although the "actual harm to O'Kelley was slight ... the potential harm to patients in other circumstances supports the punitive damages award here" (A.2-3).

The Supreme Court of Georgia elected to adopt this Court's description of the Alabama review standard rather than to apply this Court's holding as to what is required for such review to be constitutional.

We respectfully submit that the rule adopted by this Court (comparison of punitive damages to compensatory damages) is constitutionally superior to the rule adopted by the Georgia court (comparison of punitive damages to actual or likely harm), because when compensatory damages are small a person can imagine much greater "harm likely to result" and therefore punitive damages are limited only by the imagination of the reviewing court, or

the jury as inspired by plaintiff's counsel, contrary to the requirements of due process.[1]

That this Court adopted actual harm or compensatory damages as the standard of comparison (rather than likely harm) is made clear not only by what this Court said (111 S.Ct. at 1045), but by the comparison it made (111 S.Ct. at 1046):

> We are aware that the punitive damages award in this case is more than 4 times the amount of compensatory damages, [and] is more than 200 times the out-of-pocket expenses of respondent Haslip . . . .

The Court did not consider the "likely harm" which could have occurred in Haslip; instead, it considered the compensatory damages awarded.

In the case at bar, the punitive damages are 260 times the nominal damages awarded to Mr. O'Kelley's estate[2] and are 1,069 times the hospital's bill for services (which may be compared to Ms. Haslip's out-of-pocket expenses).

In *Haslip* this Court went on to say (111 S.Ct. 1046):

> While the monetary comparisons are wide and, indeed, may be close to the line, the award here did not lack objective criteria.

Certainly, 260 to 1 (or 1,069 to 1) is over the line, and $1.3 million in punitive damages is unconstitutional.

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[1]According to a recent review of state law in 2 L. Schlueter and K. Redden, *Punitive Damages*, Ch. 18, 167 et seq. (2d ed. 1989), like this Court, courts in the following states have held that the amount of punitive damages must bear a reasonable relationship to the actual damages awarded, or to the injury, or words to that effect: Arizona (id. 170), Arkansas (id. 172), Delaware (id. 182), Iowa (id. 195), Kentucky (id. 198), Missouri (id. 220), New Jersey (id. 232), Pennsylvania (id. 248) and Utah (id. 263).

[2]If the fact that the nominal damages were awarded against two defendants is taken into account, the punitive damages awarded against petitioner are 520 times the nominal damages.

The thrust of *Haslip* is clear. In order to be constitutional, punitive damages must be reasonable. "We can say, however, that general concerns of reasonableness . . . enter into the constitutional calculus" (111 S.Ct. at 1043). "As long as the [jury's] discretion is exercised within reasonable constraints, due process is satisfied" (111 S.Ct. at 1044). "This appellate review makes certain that punitive damages are reasonable in their amount . . ." (111 S.Ct. at 1045). "The standards provide for a rational relationship in determining whether a particular award is greater than reasonably necessary to punish and deter" (111 S.Ct. at 1045-1046).

Punitive damages in a given case are reasonable, and hence constitutional, if they ". . . are not grossly out of proportion to the severity of the offense and have some understandable relationship to compensatory damages." *Haslip*, 111 S.Ct. at 1045. On the other hand, punitive damages which are not the proximate cause of any injury and have no understandable relationship to compensatory damages are unreasonable and hence unconstitutional, *Haslip*, regardless of the "harm likely to result" from similar conduct in another case.

The Supreme Court of Georgia considers whether there is a rational relationship between actual damages and punitive damages in some cases, and sets those awards aside. *Colonial Pipeline Co. v. Brown*, 258 Ga. 115, 123; 365 S.E.2d 827, 833 (1988); *WMH, Inc. v. Thomas*, 260 Ga. 654, 656, 398 S.E.2d 196, 198 (1990). See how the Georgia court distinguished *Colonial Pipeline* at A.2. In other cases, to wit: this case, it refuses to consider actual damages, preferring instead to consider "likely harm".

That leaves that court free to disapprove some punitive damages awards, and approve others, but that system of review is utterly lacking in rationality and is therefore unconstitutional.

In addition to the foregoing, in *Haslip*, this Court found that, in order for an award of punitive damages to

be constitutional, it must be subjected to certain procedural protections, including post-verdict review by the trial and appellate courts to ensure that the award is not greater than reasonably necessary to punish and deter (111 S.Ct. at 1045-1046).

Nevertheless the Georgia court in this case said (A.3) "... it is clear that the Alabama post-trial review by both trial and appellate court is more structured" than in Georgia. That court then noted (A.3) that "... no Georgia courts, trial or appellate, ... have reviewed ..." this verdict in light of the Alabama factors.[3]

That is to say, the Supreme Court of Georgia declined to reconsider its earlier decision in light of *Haslip*, as this Court directed in its remand order. Its explanation for declining to make such review is as follows (A.4):

> Of what benefit, then, is scrutiny of those elements by the reviewing courts? Any review of them in an effort to ensure that punitive awards are not grossly out of proportion to the conduct and the ensuing damages would be entirely a matter of conjecture or, at least, a matter of opinion based on extraneous factors.

It may be correct to say that comparison of punitive damages to "likely harm", as utilized by the court below, would be a matter of conjecture or a matter of opinion based on extraneous factors. However, the Supreme Court of Georgia was directed to review this award in light of *Haslip*, not to conclude that such review is unnecessary as being conjectural.

The Georgia court did not review its earlier decision as required by this Court's remand order and certiorari should be granted to review its decision for both of the foregoing reasons.

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[3]Clearly the trial court has not reviewed this verdict in light of *Haslip* because the Georgia Supreme Court found such review to be unnecessary.

2. *Georgia's Punitive Damages Statute Denies Defendants Due Process And Equal Protection Of Law.*

O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, the Georgia statute on which the punitive damages award in this case was based, deprives civil defendants of due process and equal protection of law.

O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5 authorizes punitive damages in a tort action of any type, and was the only statutory authority for general punitive damages in Georgia at the time of Mr. O'Kelley's accident.[4] It provides as follows:

> In a tort action in which there are aggravating circumstances, in either the act or the intention, the jury may give additional damages to deter the wrongdoer from repeating the trespass or as compensation for the wounded feelings of the plaintiff.

Thus, under this statute, a jury is authorized to award punitive damages in any tort case in which there are "aggravating circumstances, in either the act or the intention." Recognizing that the phrase "aggravating circumstances, in either the act or the intention" is vague and indefinite and provides no notice of the proscribed conduct, the Georgia courts have, in effect, defined "aggravating circumstances" as willful misconduct, malice, fraud, wantonness, or oppression, or that entire want of care which would raise the presumption of a conscious indifference to the consequences. *Southern Ry. Co. v. O'Bryan*, 119 Ga. 147, 148-149, 45 S.E. 1000 (1903); *Kaplan v. Sanders*, 237 Ga. 132, 134, 227 S.E.2d 38, 39 (1976); *General Refractories Co. v. Rogers*, 240 Ga. 228, 230, 239 S.E.2d 795, 798 (1977). *See also* A.10.

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[4]The Georgia law regarding punitive damages was amended, effective July 1, 1987, to add a new statute governing punitive damages. O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5.1 now governs punitive damages in all causes of action occurring after July 1, 1987. The new statute places a "cap" on punitive damages in some cases, requires proof by "clear and convincing" evidence, and effects certain other changes in the law, as well.

However, these additional words are themselves vague and indefinite and provide very little guidance as to the conduct prohibited. For example, " 'Malice', as used by courts and lawyers in the last century, was a hopelessly versatile and ambiguous term, carrying a broad spectrum of meanings." *Smith v. Wade*, 461 U.S. 30, 39 fn. 8 (1983). The passage of time has not clarified the meaning of malice.

Moreover, in this case the clarity and specificity of the words and phrases used to define "aggravating circumstances" is to be measured by the least clear and least specific of such words and phrases. The phrase "that entire want of care which would raise the presumption of a conscious indifference to consequences" is most unclear and indefinite, if not meaningless, to a jury. It was that supposedly clarifying expression which was directly involved here, as demonstrated by the trial court's charge to the jury.[5]

Unlike the words "willful misconduct," which connote some intentional, affirmative, yet unacceptable act, the words "entire want of care" may connote nothing more than a failure to act, which failure may be a general failure to take any action to prevent an occurrence (an "across the board" failure to act, so to speak), or may be a failure to take any action to prevent the particular cause of an occurrence (a complete, yet particularized, failure

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[5]The trial court charged the jury, in pertinent part, as follows:

> "Now, it is not essential to recover for punitive damages that the person inflicting the damage was guilty of willful and intentional misconduct. It is sufficient that the act be done under such circumstances as evidences an entire want of care and conscious indifference to the consequences."

The complete explanation of the court regarding punitive damages is set forth in the Appendix, *infra*, at A.33-34.

to act). Neither the statutes nor the cases resolve this ambiguity.[6]

The punitive damages statute applied in this case, O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, *supra*, violates the Due Process Clause in that it permits awards of excessive punitive damages which are unreasonable in amount and irrational in light of their purpose to punish and deter. *Haslip*, *supra*. In addition, O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, *supra*, violates the Due Process Clause in each of the following specific ways, among others:

> (a) It fails, as do the court decisions interpreting it, to notify people (who are later to become defendants) of the nature of the offenses for which they may be liable in punitive damages;
>
> (b) It likewise fails, as do the court decisions interpreting it, to guide judges and juries with regard to the nature of the offenses for which punitive damages may be awarded; and
>
> (c) It fails, as do the court decisions interpreting it, to inform judges and juries as to the proper means of calculating the amount of punitive damages to be awarded by reference to actual damages.

Considered separately and cumulatively, the foregoing statutory failures render O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5 invalid as a denial of due process.

As this Court noted in *Musser v. Utah*, 333 U.S. 95, 97 (1948): "Legislation may run afoul of the Due Process Clause because it fails to give adequate guidance to those who would be law-abiding, to advise defendants of the nature of the offense with which they are charged, or to guide courts in trying those who are accused." *See also*

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[6]Hence, Georgia law is distinguishable from Mississippi law, which proscribes "willful and intentional wrong, or such gross negligence and reckless negligence as is equivalent to such wrong". See Justice O'Connor's concurring opinion in *Bankers Life and Cas. Co. v. Crenshaw*, 486 U.S. 71, 88 (1988).

Cline v. Frink Dairy Co., 274 U.S. 445 (1927); *Bouie v. City of Columbia*, 378 U.S. 347, 350-51 (1964).

Although the foregoing decisions involved criminal laws, the due process requirement of reasonable certainty in fixing a standard of obedience in advance applies to civil as well as criminal legislation. *Cline v. Frink Dairy Co., supra*, 274 U.S. at 463, citing *Small Co. v. American Sugar Ref. Co.*, 267 U.S. 233, 238 (1925).[7]

The purposes of punitive damages are deterrence and retribution. *Haslip, supra*, 111 S.Ct. at 1044. A law, such as O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, which does not specify the conduct to be deterred fails in its deterrent purpose and also punishes without warning.

In addition, vague penalty provisions pose constitutional questions if they do not state with sufficient clarity the consequences of violating a given statute. *United States v. Batchelder*, 442 U.S. 114, 123 (1979); *United States v. Evans*, 333 U.S. 483 (1948). Certainly, then, a law which fails to inform judges and juries as to the proper means of calculating or determining the amount of punitive damages to be awarded (by reference to the compensatory damages incurred) is a violation of due process.[8]

The statute here in issue fails to set forth any meaningful standard or criterion for the jury to apply in determining whether or not to award punitive damages, and if so,

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[7]A state law which deprives a person of property without due process of law would violate the Due Process Clause whether that state law be criminal, or civil, or hybrid. *See Giaccio v. Pennsylvania*, 382 U.S. 399, 402 (1966).

[8]In Georgia, the "measure" of punitive damages is "the enlightened conscience of an impartial jury." *Head v. John Deere Plow Co.*, 71 Ga. App. 276, 279, 30 S.E.2d 662, 664 (1944). This was the "measure" of damages presented to the jury in the instant case in the charge (A.33). The jury was not instructed, as in *Haslip*, that it should consider the character and degree of the wrong and the necessity of preventing similar wrong. *Haslip*, 111 S.Ct. at 1044.

the amount. It leaves to the unbridled discretion of a random jury what to give and whether to give it.

Each award of punitive damages, therefore, represents not a governmental decision but an award that speaks to the conscience of a particular jury with no uniformity, thus permitting awards under the same or similar circumstances to vary widely and wildly in amount, according to the arbitrary notion, and potential prejudice, of one particular group of people. See *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.*, 418 U.S. 323, 350 (1974) ("Consequently, juries assess punitive damages in wholly unpredictable amounts. . . ."); *Smith v. Wade*, 461 U.S. 30 at 59 (Rehnquist, J. dissenting) ("punitive damages are frequently based upon the caprice and prejudice of the jurors."); and *International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers v. Foust*, 442 U.S. 42, 50 (1979) ("[T]he impact of these windfall recoveries is unpredictable and potentially substantial").

Under these circumstances, a state's interest in deterring improper conduct is delegated to a private party, accountable to no one, and "[t]he plaintiff's position is analogous to that of the prosecuting attorney whose pay is determined by the number of convictions he is able to secure." Morris, "Punitive Damages in Tort Cases", XLIV Harv. L. Rev. 1173 (1931). A prosecuting attorney's salary, however, pales in comparison to the potential pay-off to a successful plaintiff with a punitive damages claim.

Punitive damages as allowed by O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, supra, are inconsistent in every respect with the requirements of procedural due-process.

In addition, O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5 violates the Equal Protection Clause. Punitive damages extracted from a civil litigant serve the same purpose as a fine imposed upon a criminal defendant, to wit: punishment. Punitive damages ". . . serve the same function as criminal penalties . . . ." *Rosenbloom v. Metromedia, Inc.*, 403 U.S. 29, 82 (1971)

(Marshall, J., dissenting); *overruled on other grounds, Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.*, 418 U.S. 323 (1974).

As the court below recognized (A.11), punitive damages are "private fines levied by civil juries . . .", citing *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc., supra*, 418 U.S. at 350. Regardless of whether such "fines" are "public" or "private," they are "fines". This is particularly so in Georgia where a plurality of the Georgia Supreme Court once found such fines to be subject to Georgia's constitutional prohibition against "excessive fines". Ga. Const. 1983, Art. I, Sec. I, Par. XVII; *Colonial Pipeline Company v. Brown*, 258 Ga. 115, 365 S.E.2d 827 (1988); but see A.12.

Although not criminal fines within the meaning of the Eighth Amendment, *Browning-Ferris Industries v. Kelco Disposal, Inc.*, 492 U.S. 257 (1989), punitive damages awarded to private parties nevertheless are fines, at least quasi-criminal in nature, and hence should be treated for equal protection purposes in the same classification, or a class next thereto, as fines imposed in criminal cases.

When viewed in this light, the statute in issue here offends equal protection of the laws because it provides fewer protections for private litigants in tort suits than the criminal law provides to persons subject to fines. That is to say, comparing defendants in criminal cases liable for fines and defendants in civil cases liable for punitive damages (fines, *Gertz, supra*), the latter are denied equal protection because the former are afforded protections not afforded civil litigants, such as advance notice of the nature of the offenses for which they may be punished, and the consequent certainty that judges and juries will be informed of the nature of the offenses for which such punitive fines may be imposed.

Defendants in criminal cases also have the protection of a statutory limitation upon the amount of fine which may be imposed, and protection against double jeopardy. Moreover, persons charged with crimes may not be convicted unless they are found guilty beyond a reasonable

doubt, an important and fundamental protection of the individual against punitive action and a substantially higher burden of proof than a mere preponderance of the evidence. Civil defendants subject to punitive damage awards are denied these and other fundamental protections afforded defendants subject to criminal fines.

As the Chief Justice noted in his dissenting opinion in *Smith v. Wade, supra*, 461 U.S. at 59, punitive damages are "unaccompanied by the types of safeguards present in criminal proceedings." The denial of these safeguards under an open ended punitive damage statute permits "overkill" ("overdeterrence"), is not rationally related to a legitimate state interest (punishment or deterrence), and violates the Constitution.

In sum, the fines imposed as punitive damages in civil cases under Georgia's statute deprive civil defendants of the equal protection of the laws afforded criminal defendants, and the statute in issue should be declared unconstitutional for this additional reason.

CONCLUSION

Petitioner's constitutional claims are substantial. It has been punished in an amount vastly out of proportion to the nominal damages it was found to have caused. The Supreme Court of Georgia has refused to apply *Pacific Mutual v. Haslip* to the award entered in this case, notwithstanding this Court's remand order. Petitioner's punishment has been imposed, over its repeated objections and protests, without any of the safeguards or protections that due process, equal protection and *Haslip* require.

Notwithstanding *Haslip*, punitive damage awards continue to run wild. This case affords this Court the opportunity to reinforce *Haslip*. This Petition for Writ of Certiorari therefore should be granted and this case should be briefed and set for oral argument not only to

require compliance with *Haslip* but to address important punitive damages issues not reached in *Haslip*.

December 27, 1991

Respectfully submitted,

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Decided: October 18, 1991

In the Supreme Court of Georgia

46956. HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY v. JONES.

HUNT, Justice.

In the previous appearance of this case, this court sustained a punitive damage award against the hospital authority. *Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County v. Jones*, 259 Ga. 759 (386 S.E.2d 120) (1989).[1] The United States Supreme Court vacated that judgment and remanded the case to us for reconsideration in light of *Pacific Mutual Life Ins. Co. v. Haslip*, U.S. (111 S.Ct. 1032, LE2d) (1991).

1. William Harold O'Kelley was severely burned in an automobile accident and was taken to Joan Glancy Hospital in Gwinnett County by ambulance, where he was stabilized. Shortly thereafter, in an attempt to airlift him by helicopter to a hospital with a burn unit, the helicopter crashed. Although others were killed, O'Kelley was only slightly injured, but died several days later as a result of the burns suffered in the automobile accident.

The administrator of O'Kelley's estate sued the hospital authority and was awarded $5,001.00 in nominal damages and $1,300,00.00 [sic] in punitive damages. This court observed:

> A policy of bypassing emergency care at a nearby hospital or diverting patients from an institution whose specialty would have been beneficial to a patient in order to utilize the authority's own hospitals supports a jury's finding of wanton disregard for the

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[1]In our original opinion, we noted the issue whether punitive damages are appropriately awarded against a hospital authority had not been raised in this case. But see, *Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Auth. v. Boswell*, Ga. (Case No. S91G0043, decided July 16, 1991); *Hospital Auth. of Fulton County v. Litterilla*, 199 Ga. App. 345 SE2d) (1991), *cert. granted* July 5, 1991.

> rights, and a conscious indifference to the best interests, of its injured patients. . . . [B]ecause the jury could decide that the patient's slight injuries in the helicopter incident would not have occurred but for the emergency care policy, the award of nominal damages was authorized and it was not inappropriate that the jury act to deter such conduct through the use of punitive damages under O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5.

Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County v. Jones, 259 Ga. at 761. This court approved the award of punitive damages, finding it neither excessive nor violative of due process.

In so holding, we pointed out that, in Georgia, the purpose of punitive damages is to deter the repetition of reprehensible conduct by the defendant or others. O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5.[2] Because deterrence is based on factors other than the actual harm caused, we rejected the notion that punitive damages must necessarily bear some relationship to the *actual* damages awarded by the jury.[3] *Id.*, at p. 762. We adhere to this ruling today.

While the Supreme Court in *Haslip* analyzed the punitive damages award by comparing it to the actual award, nothing in the opinion mandates such a comparison. In fact, the Court approved the Alabama review standards which include "whether there is a *reasonable relationship* between the punitive damages award and the harm *likely to result* from the defendant's conduct as well as the harm that actually has occurred." [Emphasis supplied.] While comparison to the actual damages may be appropriate in one case, e.g., *Colonial Pipeline v. Brown*, 258 Ga. 115, 123 (365 S.E.2d 827) (1988), it may not in another. We think *Jones* is one of the latter cases. The actual harm to

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[2]2 Under the new act, punitive damages may be awarded "to penalize, punish, or deter." O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5.1. *Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County v. Jones*, supra, 259 Ga. at p. 761, n. 5.

[3]We did, however, note that this relationship may be considered on the issue whether the punitive damage award is excessive due to undue passion and prejudice. *Jones*, supra at p. 762, n. 9.

O'Kelley was slight, but the potential harm to patients in other circumstances supports the punitive damages award here. The purpose of punitive damages, after all, is to deter such conduct. This award, therefore, is consistent both with the nature of the authority's conduct and the potential ensuing injuries. Surely the process is not rendered unconstitutional by permitting the deterrence of potentially dangerous conduct at a point in time when the injury is slight and when only nominal damages may be involved. Society's interest would seem better served by deterring objectionable conduct at the first opportunity so that the potentially greater injury which might otherwise be caused by such conduct might be avoided.

2. The authority's principal argument on remand is confined to the issue discussed in Division 1. We note, however, that in approving the Alabama procedures, the United States Supreme Court focused on the jury instructions, the post-trial procedures by the trial court, and the post-trial procedures by the state supreme court. *Haslip*, supra, 111 S.Ct. at 1044-46.[4] While Georgia jury instructions may be said to be quite similar to those given in Alabama, it is clear that the Alabama post-trial review by both the trial and appellate court is more structured. See, e.g., *Hammond v. City of Gadsden*, 493 So.2d 1374 (1986), and *Green Oil Co. v. Hornsby*, 530 So.2d 218 (1989).

For example, among the guidelines for the review by the Alabama Supreme Court are

> (c) The profitability to the defendant of the wrongful conduct and the desirability of removing that profit and of having the defendant also sustain a loss; (d) the 'financial position' of the defendant. . . .

Haslip, supra, at 1045. We know of no Georgia courts, trial or appellate, which have reviewed these factors. This is not surprising, of course, since no evidence pertaining

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[4]In Alabama, civil suits exceeding $10,000 come within the appellate jurisdiction of the Alabama Supreme Court.

to either factor would have been submitted to the jury. Nor was such evidence offered in *Haslip* or in any of the other cited Alabama cases.[5] Of what benefit, then, is scrutiny of those elements by the reviewing courts? Any review of them in an effort to ensure that punitive awards are not grossly out of proportion to the conduct and the ensuing damages would be entirely a matter of conjecture or, at least, a matter of opinion based on extraneous factors. Consequently, the verdict in this case would not be more successfully challenged if subjected to Alabama's analysis rather than our own.

Punitive damages do not survive court scrutiny because they can be accurately measured and adjusted by court imposed guidelines.[6] They survive, as Justice Scalia notes, because of their historical acceptance.

> Nor to my mind can anything [but the conclusiveness of history] explain today's decision that a punishment who's assessment and extent are committed entirely to the discretion of the jury is 'fundamentally fair.' The court relies upon two inconsequential factors. First, the 'guidance' to the jury provided by the admonition that it 'take into consideration the character and the degree of the wrong as shown by the evidence and necessity of preventing similar wrong.' That is not guidance but platitude. Second, review of the *amount* of the verdict by the trial and appellate courts, which are also governed by no discernable standard except what they have done in other cases . . . But it would surely not be considered 'fair' (or in accordance with due process) to follow a similar procedure outside of this historically ap-

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[5]"Any evidence of Pacific Mutual's wealth was excluded from the trial in accord with Alabama law." *Haslip*, supra, 111 S.Ct. at 1044.

[6]The legislature, on the other hand, has by its 1987 enactment, O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5.1(g), made an impact of undeniable significance. Had this case been tried under that statute, the award could have been only $250,000. Alabama enacted the same limitation, also in 1987. See 1987 Ala. Acts, No. 87-185, §§ 1, 2, and 4.

> proved context — for example, to dispense with meaningful guidance concerning *compensatory* damages, so long as whatever number the jury picks out of the air can be reduced by the trial judge or on appeal. I can conceive of no test relating to 'fairness' in the abstract that would approve this procedure, unless it is whether something even more unfair could be imagined.

Haslip, supra, 111 S.Ct. at 1053 (Scalia, J., concurring). Clothed in common law history and tradition, the punitive damage process is thus able to withstand a due process challenge which less inveterate procedures could not.

We have reconsidered our previous judgment in light of *Haslip* and have determined that its reversal is not required.

Judgment affirmed and reinstated on remand. All the Justices concur, except Bell and Fletcher, J.J., who concur in the judgment only.

SUPREME COURT OF GEORGIA
Atlanta, November 1, 1991

The Honorable Supreme Court met pursuant to adjournment.

The following order was passed:

HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY ET AL. V. R. STANFORD JONES, ADMR., ET AL.

Upon consideration of the Motion for Reconsideration filed in this case, it is ordered that it be hereby denied. All the Justices concur.

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA,
CLERK'S OFFICE, ATLANTA

I certify that the above is a true extract from the minutes of the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Witness my signature and the seal of said court hereto affixed the day and year last above written.

/s/ LYNN M. STINCHCOMB
Lynn M. Stinchcomb,
Deputy Clerk

Decided: November 22, 1989

In the Supreme Court of Georgia

46956. HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY ET AL. v. JONES, ADMR. ET AL.

HUNT, Justice.

This case raises issues regarding punitive damages: whether the award is authorized under the facts of this case, whether the award is excessive, and whether punitive damages are constitutional under the excessive fines, equal protection, and due process clauses of our state and federal constitutions.[1]

On May 20, 1985,[2] William Harold O'Kelley was severely burned over seventy per cent of his body from a fire caused by a head-on collision between his truck and a car in Gwinnett County. Emergency personnel responding to the accident immediately called for a medivac helicopter to evacuate O'Kelley to Grady Hospital's burn unit. While still en route to the accident site, the supervisor of the Gwinnett Hospital Authority's emergency rescue unit, Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., countermanded the unanimous judgment of the emergency technicians at the scene and ordered the patient brought to Joan Glancy Hospital, one of the hospital authority's institutions, even though the helicopter was approaching as the ambulance was leaving with the patient. The helicopter was also diverted to Joan Glancy Hospital.

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[1]None of the parties before us raised the question whether punitive damages are appropriately awarded against a public authority and we express no opinion on this issue. Compare *City of Columbus v. Myszka*, 246 Ga. 571 (4) (272 SE2d 302) (1980) (a municipal corporation is not liable for punitive damages); *MARTA v. Binns*, 252 Ga. 289 (313 SE2d 104) (1984) (a rapid transit authority is liable for punitive damages in its capacity as a self-insurer).

[2]Thus, the 1987 legislative amendments to the damage provisions are not directly applicable. Ga. L. 1987, p. 915.

The Gwinnett Chief of Police, who was the dispatch officer at the time of the accident, related facts of other specific instances when an emergency patient was not taken to the nearest hospital or to a trauma center, but instead to one of the authority's institutions. He further testified that Metro's reason for this policy was to "provide more services to the county."

At the hospital emergency room the patient was stabilized, by the establishment of IV lines which the EMT had been unsuccessful in starting in the ambulance, placement of a respiratory tube in the patient's burned throat after he complained of shortness of breath about an hour after reaching the hospital, and administration of morphine. Due to the severity of his injuries, the patient's chances of survival were about 1%. About an hour and a half after arriving, O'Kelley was strapped into a stretcher and loaded onto the helicopter for evacuation to Humana hospital in Augusta. On lift-off from the hospital parking lot, the helicopter hit a light pole and crashed. Experts testified at trial that the accident was caused by gross pilot error, not only for flying into the pole, but also because the water-alcohol tank, which may have been necessary to give added power to the helicopter engine for the ascent from such a confined space, was empty.

Incredibly, though the pilot and another occupant of the helicopter were killed, O'Kelley was only slightly injured in the helicopter crash. O'Kelley was transported by ambulance to Grady Hospital, where he died six days later as a result of his extensive burns. The bill for services from Joan Glancy Hospital was $1,216.26.

The administrator of O'Kelley's estate sued [3] the Gwinnett Hospital Authority in its own capacity and as the owner of the Gwinnett Ambulance Services doing busi-

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[3]The driver of the other car involved in the accident and her employing companies were also sued, but that aspect of the case is not relevant here.

ness as Metro Ambulance Services, Inc.[4], for the negligent acts of the hospital authority employees.

The jury awarded O'Kelley's estate nominal damages of $5,001.00 against the hospital authority and Metro, and punitive damages of $1,300,000.00 against the Gwinnett Hospital Authority and $5,000.00 against Metro Ambulance Services, Inc. The hospital authority appeals.

1. In its first enumeration of error, the Gwinnett Hospital Authority contends the trial court erred in failing to direct a verdict in its favor on the ground that evidence did not authorize an award of punitive damages. The estate relied on two theories to support its demand for punitive damages: that the hospital authority, motivated by a desire to increase profits rather than by the best interests of its patients, directed emergency patients to its own institutions despite the fact that other hospitals were closer or more suited for the care required by the patient, and that the hospital authority failed to maintain proper emergency helicopter landing areas at its hospitals, specifically Joan Glancy, even though it knew the landings were unsafe and medivac helicopters would occasionally be required to use them.

OCGA § 51-12-5 provides for the award of punitive damages:

> In a tort action in which there are aggravating circumstances, in either the act or the intention, the jury may give additional damages to deter the wrongdoer from repeating the trespass or as compensation for the wounded feelings of the plaintiff.[5]

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[4]Although the hospital authority owned Metro only from 1982 until it sold the service to the county in 1986, it retained the right to direct to which hospital the patients would be taken.

[5]Punitive damages to punish or penalize the defendant, as well as to deter him, are provided for under the revised act. Ga. L. 1987, p. 915.

The courts have consistently required that

> [t]o authorize the imposition of punitive or exemplary damages there must be evidence of wilful misconduct, malice, fraud, wantonness, or oppression, or that entire want of care which would raise the presumption of a conscious indifference to consequences. [Cits.]

Kaplan v. Sanders, 237 Ga. 132, 134 (227 SE2d 38) (1976); *Associated Health Systems v. Jones*, 186 Ga. App. 798 (2) (366 SE2d 147) (1988). The measure of damages, "within the enlightened conscience of a jury," appears to be judicially engrafted onto this code section.[6] *King v. Towns*, 102 Ga. App. 895, 904 (118 SE2d 121) (1960); *Head v. John Deere Plow Co.*, 71 Ga. App. 276, 279 (30 SE2d 662) (1944). See division 5, infra.

There is some evidence in this record to support a finding of aggravated conduct and, therefore, the award of punitive damages. A policy of bypassing emergency care at a nearby hospital or diverting patients from an institution whose specialty would have been beneficial to a patient in order to utilize the authority's own hospitals supports a jury's finding a wanton disregard for the rights, and a conscious indifference to the best interests, of its injured patients. Although the evidence was, to be sure, conflicting, it authorized a determination that the authority's decision was made on an economic, rather

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[6]This test must have been adopted from OCGA § 51-12-6: where "the entire injury is to the peace, happiness, or feelings of the plaintiff, no measure of damages can be prescribed except the enlightened conscience of impartial jurors." Under this code section, however, "evidence of the worldly circumstances of the parties, the amount of bad faith in the transaction, and all the attendant facts should be weighed" by the jury, with the express proviso that "the verdict should not be disturbed unless the court suspects bias or prejudice from its excess or its inadequacy." Under OCGA § 51-12-5, such evidence is excluded. *Bob Maddox Dodge, Inc. v. McKie*, 155 Ga. App. 263 (3), (270 SE2d 690) (1980); *Hodges v. Youmans*, 129 Ga. App. 481, 486 (200 SE2d 157) (1973).

than a medical, basis. Therefore, because the jury could decide that the patient's slight injuries in the helicopter incident would not have occurred but for the emergency care policy, the award of nominal damages was authorized and it was not inappropriate that the jury act to deter such conduct through the use of punitive damages under OCGA § 51-12-5.[7] *Woodbury v. Whitmire*, 246 Ga. 349, 351 (271 SE2d 491) (1980).

2. The award in this case is not, as a matter of law, excessive. See division 5, infra. That this award appears to bear no rational relationship to the extent of the injury is of no consequence.[8] "[Punitive damages] are not compensation for injury. Instead, they are private fines levied by civil juries to punish reprehensible conduct and to deter its future occurrence." *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.*, 418 US 323, 350 (94 SC 2997, 41 LE2d 789) (1974). The concept of proportionality as a *legal* limitation on the amount of punitive damages applies, in Georgia, only when such damages are given to compensate for wounded feelings. A deterrence award is based on factors, for the most part, unrelated to the injury to any particular victim, and is limited only by the collective conscience of the jury. *Smith v. Milikin*, 247 Ga. 369 (3) (276 SE2d 35) (1981); *King v. Towns*, supra, 102 Ga. App. at 904; *Davis v. Glaze*, 182 Ga. App. 18, 23 (354 SE2d 845) (1987); *Lang v. Hopkins*, 10 Ga. 37 (3) (1851); OCGA § 51-12-12. Compare *Jones v. Spindel*, 122 Ga. App. 390, 394 (177 SE2d 187) (1970). However, while in deterrence cases

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[7]Because punitive damages are supportable on the theory that the authority acted in conscious disregard of its patients' rights by diverting them to its own institutions, we need not address whether the failure to maintain an adequate heliport at Joan Glancy Hospital might also support the award. However, "[i]t is the general rule that the mere nonperformance of a duty, even though it be one required by law, will not authorize the recovery of punitive damages." *Kaplan v. Sanders*, supra, 237 Ga. at 133-134.

[8]The plaintiffs in this case sought no actual damages for injuries, including pain and suffering, or for wrongful death.

there is no fixed rule regarding a relationship between the award of punitive and actual damages, a court may always consider that fact in questioning the excessiveness of the verdict.[9] E.g., *Colonial Pipeline v. Brown*, 258 Ga. 115, 123 (365 SE2d 827) (1988) (plurality opinion).

3. There is no merit to the hospital authority's contention that an award of punitive damages violates the excessive fines clause of the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. *Browning-Ferris Industries of Vermont, Inc. v. Kelso,* US , (57 USLW 4985, decided June 26, 1989). Nor, under the facts of this case, do we find a violation of the excessive fines clause of our Georgia Constitution, Art. I, Sec. I. Par. XVII. Compare, *Colonial Pipeline Co. v. Brown*, supra, 258 Ga. at (4).

4. Neither the lower standard for liability, the absence of certain protections available to criminal defendants, nor the lack of a ceiling on the amount of punitive damages that can be awarded, results in a denial of equal protection to civil, as compared to criminal, defendants. Because no fundamental rights or suspect classes are involved, these classifications pass the rational basis test under minimal scrutiny. *Colonial Pipeline Co. v. Brown*, supra, 258 Ga. at 124 (Clark, P.J., dissenting).

5. The hospital authority contends that OCGA § 51-12-5, supra, violates due process in that its notice as to the proscribed conduct is unconstitutionally vague and in that its measure of damages, based solely on the "enlightened conscience of the jury," permits verdicts which may be arbitrary and oppressive and yet not subject to limitation by appropriate procedural safeguards.

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[9]An inordinately large deterrence award may be set aside as reflecting undue passion and prejudice rather than an enlightened conscience, *Jones v. Spindel*, supra; OCGA § 51-12-12. We view the language in *Colonial Pipeline*, supra, 258 Ga. at 123, as to the lack of proportionality in this light. We do not see *Colonial* as inconsistent with such cases as *Smith v. Milikin*, supra, 247 Ga. at 372, or *King v. Towns*, supra, 102 Ga. App. at 904.

a. Initially, the hospital authority argues that neither a potential defendant nor a jury can distinguish between a "lack of ordinary care" amounting to negligence and an "entire want of care" entitling a plaintiff to punitive damages. We disagree. Since, under Georgia law, a scienter element which goes beyond even gross negligence is required, e.g., *BLI Construction Co., Inc. v. Debari*, 135 Ga. App. 299, 302 (217 SE2d 426) (1975), the standard of conduct set by OCGA § 51-12-5 is not unconstitutionally vague.

Under proper instruction from the trial court, a jury may distinguish between merely negligent or grossly negligent behavior and the scienter necessary to meet the standard for punitive damages: "wilful misconduct, malice, fraud, wantonness or oppression, or that entire want of care that raises a presumption of a conscious indifference to consequences." As the United States Supreme Court said in *Village of Hoffman Estates v. Flipside, Hoffman Estates, Inc.*, 455 US 489, 499-500 (102 SC 1186, 71 LE2d 362) (1982):

> The Court has also expressed greater tolerance of enactments with civil rather than criminal penalties because the consequences of imprecision are qualitatively less severe. And the Court has recognized that a scienter requirement may mitigate a law's vagueness, especially with respect to the adequacy of notice to the complainant that his conduct is proscribed. [Footnotes omitted.]

See generally, *Smith v. Wade*, 461 US 30, 46-51 (103 SC 1625, 72 LE2d 632) (1983); *Bankers Life & Casualty Co. v. Crenshaw*, 486 U.S. 71 (108 SC 1645, 100 LE2d 62) (1988) (Justice O'Connor concurring in part.)[10]

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[10] "Although this standard may describe the required mental state with sufficient precision, the amount of the penalty that may ensue is left completely indeterminate."

b. Punitive damages, like damages for pain and suffering, are decided in this state according to the "enlightened conscience of the jury." The hospital authority contends this standard denies due process in failing to establish any guidelines to channel the broad discretion of the jury.

The right to punitive damages derives from the common-law.[11] See, 1 Callaghan, *Punitive Damages Law and Practice*, § 1.01.[12] Although OCGA § 51-12-5 codifies the right to punitive damages where "there are aggravating circumstances, in either the act or the intention," guidelines for neither the conduct nor the amount of damages are included in the statute. As set out in division 1, supra, the standard for judging the defendant's conduct entitling the plaintiff to punitive damages has been judicially explicated. See also, division 5(a). Likewise, the standard by which the jury assesses damages has been judicially engrafted onto the statute.[13] Historically, the jury's dis-

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[11]"Whether in this case common-law remedies . . . constitute due process of law must turn on an analysis of the competing interests at stake, viewed against the background of "history, reason, [and] the past course of decisions." *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 US 651, 675 (97 SC 1401, 51 LE2d 711) (1977).

[12]Callaghan points out in his treatise, supra, at § 3.03, p. 3-15:

> thus far, each time a punitive damages statute has been attacked on void-for-vagueness grounds, the argument has been rejected because the courts have found sufficient standards to properly apply the challenged legislation. In addition to the reasons for doing so supplied by the courts, those results may be due, in large measure, to the fact that the statutes amounted to nothing more than a codification of a general common-law rule.

E.g., *Bertero v. National General Corp.*, 529 P2d 608, 625 n.13 (118 Cal. Rptr. 184) (1975).

[13]Since the standard for measuring damages is judicially created, see n. 6, supra, we recommend that trial courts, even under the new statute, see n. 2, supra, consider charging the jury on the factors appropriate to the verdict. Such factors may include: (1) the nature and egregiousness of the defendant's conduct; (2) the extent and duration of the defendant's wrongdoing and the possibility of its recurrence; (3) the intent of the defendant in committing the wrong;

cretion is controlled *by the facts of the case* as evaluated "in the enlightened conscience of the jury." See n. 6, supra. It is important to point out, however, that there are other controls upon the jury's verdict, which have served over the years as a check to the jury's unbridled discretion.

The statutory scheme itself is designed to protect defendants against excessive verdicts. As was said in *Brown v. Service Coach Lines, Inc.*, 71 Ga. App. 437, 444 (31 SE2d 236) (1944):

> [t]he rules of law governing (1) the right of the jury to originally fix the damages, (2) the right of the appellate court to grant a new trial where the verdict is alleged to be excessive or inadequate, and (3) the right of the trial judge to grant a new trial where in his discretion he thinks the verdict 'unfair, unjust, contrary to the evidence, excessive, or too small,' exist apart from and independent of each other.

Trial courts are authorized to set aside arbitrary verdicts under OCGA § 51-12-12:

> The question of damages is one for the jury; and the court should not interfere with the jury's discretion unless the damages are either so small or so excessive as to justify the inference of gross mistake or undue bias,

or, if requested by a proper motion for new trial under OCGA § 5-5-20, ". . . when the verdict of a jury is found contrary to evidence and the principles of justice and equity, the judge presiding may grant a new trial before another jury." In fact, the rule allowing a trial court to

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(4) the profitability of the defendant's wrongdoing; (5) the amount of actual damages awarded; (6) previous awards of punitive damages against the defendant; (7) potential or prior criminal sanctions against the defendant based upon the same wrongful acts; and (8) any other pertinent circumstances. 1 Callaghan, supra, at § 5.39 (Supp. 1989). Under the new law, Ga. L. 1987, p. 915, evidence of the financial circumstances of the defendant may be admissible.

grant a new trial under OCGA § 5-5-20 is considerably less stringent than under OCGA § 51-12-12:

> When a trial judge orders a new trial on the general grounds in a damage case, this court will presume that his mind and conscience were satisfied that the verdict was unjust in some respect; not merely that he himself, if he had been acting as a juror, would not have fixed upon the amount specified in the verdict. If the judge, had he been upon the jury, could not conscientiously have given acquiescence to the verdict rendered, he is not required to approve it; and we will not control him in refusing to do so. On the other hand, if he can conscientiously acquiesce in the verdict, though it may not exactly accord with his best judgment, or though some other finding might seem somewhat more satisfactory to his mind, and if his sense of justice is reasonably satisfied, he should, in the absence of some material error of law, affecting the trial approve it, and this court will uphold him in so doing.

Holland v. Williams, 3 Ga. App. 636, 638 (60 SE 331) (1907). As was said in *Seaboard Air-Line Ry. Co. v. Benton*, 43 Ga. App. 495, 505 (159 SE 717) (1931),

> [b]efore a verdict becomes final it should, where the losing party requires it by a motion for a new trial, receive the approval of the mind and conscience of the trial judge. He is sometimes spoken of as the thirteenth juror. Until his approval is given, the verdict does not become binding, in a case where a motion for a new trial contains the general grounds.

Thus, under both of these statutes, a trial court has the broad discretionary authority to set aside any judgment it considers excessive and not supported by the evidence.[14]

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[14]Ga. L. 1987, p. 915 reveals an even stronger state policy authorizing trial judges to reduce or reject excessive verdicts not in accordance with the *preponderance of the evidence*.

The appellate courts may also set aside an oppressive jury verdict under OCGA § 51-12-12. Although the statutory standard has been variously described,

> [a]s a general rule, the size of the award for damages in a case such as this is left to the enlightened conscience of impartial jurors, *subject to approval of the trial court. Jones v. Spindel*, 122 Ga. App. 390 (177 SE2d 23) (1970). The appellate court will not disturb the award "absent an award so excessive or inadequate as to shock the judicial conscience." [Emphasis supplied.]

Davis v. Glaze, supra, 182 Ga. App. at 23. Accord, *Smith v. Milikin*, supra, 247 Ga. at 372. While this test admittedly sets a high threshold for an appellate court to upset a jury verdict, that standard is not unlike the "arbitrary and unreasonable" measure for unconstitutionality. E.g., *Barrett v. Hamby*, 235 Ga. 262, 265 (219 SE2d 399) (1975).

We hold that the general standard of review of damages awards set out in OCGA § 51-12-12 and OCGA § 5-5-20 is designed to protect defendants subjected to punitive damages that amount to a deprivation of property. Thus, we conclude the statutory scheme providing for punitive damages does not deny due process for failing to provide adequate procedural safeguards and is not *per se* unconstitutional, but under OCGA § 51-12-12, and, if requested by a motion for new trial under OCGA § 5-5-20, each verdict must be scrutinized to see that it meets the parameters of due process.

In the case before us, the hospital authority moved for a new trial and specifically requested the trial court to review the punitive damages awarded. The trial court declined to set the award aside. We have reviewed the evidence presented in this case and hold, under the circumstances presented, the trial court did not abuse its discretion in refusing to overrule the jury's punitive damage award. Nor, do we find the judgment so excessive

as to be unconstitutional. OCGA § 5-5-20; OCGA § 51-12-12. We affirm.

Judgment affirmed. Clarke, P. J., Smith, J., Gregory, J., Bell, J., and Judge James W. Head concur in the opinion. Marshall, C. J., concurs in the judgment only. Weltner, J., not participating.

SUPREME COURT OF GEORGIA
Atlanta, December 20, 1989

The Honorable Supreme Court met pursuant to adjournment.

The following order was passed:

HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY ET AL. V. R. STANFORD JONES, ADMR., ET AL.

Upon consideration of the motion for reconsideration filed in this case, it is ordered that it be hereby denied. Marshall, C.J., Clarke, P.J., Smith, Gregory & Bell, JJ., and Judge James W. Head concur. Weltner, J., not participating.

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA,
CLERK'S OFFICE, ATLANTA

I certify that the above is a true extract from the minutes of the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Witness my signature and the seal of said court hereto affixed the day and year last above written.

/s/ JOLINE B. WILLIAMS
Joline B. Williams, Clerk

THE STATE COURT OF COBB COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY, Plaintiff, vs. HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, Individually and d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES; METRO AMBULANCE SERVICES, INC., Defendants.	CIVIL ACTION 87A-17816-4

JUDGMENT

[Filed September 27, 1988]

The foregoing action having come on regularly for trial by jury before the Court on September 19, 1988, Honorable Harris Adams presiding, and the issues having been duly tried and the parties having presented witnesses and evidence, and the jury having returned a verdict in favor of the Plaintiff and against the Defendants, jointly and severally in the amount of $5,001.00 as nominal damages, $1,300,000.00 as exemplary damages against Defendant Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County and $5,000.00 as exemplary damages against Defendant Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., it is hereby ordered that the verdict of the jury shall be made the judgment of the Court.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that the Plaintiff R. Stanford Jones, as Administrator of the Estate of William Harold O'Kelley, shall have and re-

cover of Defendants Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County and Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., jointly and severally, $5,001.00, together with $1,300,000.00 from Defendant Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County and $5,000.00 from Defendant Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., together with interest thereon from the date of this Judgment at the rate of 12% as provided by law. Further, Plaintiff shall have and recover from Defendant Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County prejudgment interest in the amount of $60,000.00.

IT IS SO ORDERED this 27th day of September, 1988.

By: /s/ HARRIS ADAMS
Honorable Harris Adams, Judge
State Court of Cobb County

IN THE STATE COURT OF COBB COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY, Plaintiff, vs. HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, Individually and d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES; METRO AMBULANCE SERVICES, INC., Defendants.	CIVIL ACTION 87A-17816-4

AMENDMENT TO THE ANSWER AND DEFENSES OF THE HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA, D.B.A. GWINNETT HOSPITAL SYSTEM TO COMPLAINT OF PLAINTIFF

[Filed April 14, 1988]

Comes now THE HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA, d.b.a. GWINNETT HOSPITAL SYSTEM, erroneously designated as Gwinnett Ambulance Services, named as a defendant in the above-entitled action, and files this its Amendment To Its Answer and Defensive Pleadings to the Complaint of Plaintiff as follows:

NINTH DEFENSE

The statutes of the state of Georgia which authorize the imposition of aggravated, exemplary, or punitive damages (O.C.G.A. §§ 51-12-5 or 51-12-5.1) are contrary, by their

express terms and as they may be applied to this defendant in this case, to the Constitution of the United States and the Georgia Constitution, and are therefore void inasmuch as said statutes allow for the deprivation of property without due process of law (U.S. Constitution Amendments V and XIV; Georgia Constitution Article 1, Section 1, Paragraph 1) in that:

(1) Said statutes fail to define or provide advance notice of the prohibited behavior with reasonable clarity.

(2) Said statutes fail to specify the upper limit of damages to be imposed.

(3) Said statutes fail to set standards or criteria for the jury to apply in determining whether to impose punitive damages and, if so, the amount thereof.

As a consequence of the above defects in the statutes, the statutes leave to the unbridled discretion of a random jury whether to impose such damages and the amount thereof, thereby authorizing an award of aggravated, exemplary, or punitive damages which is unpredictable, arbitrary, capricious and disproportionate.

TENTH DEFENSE

The statutes of the state of Georgia which authorize the imposition of aggravated, exemplary, or punitive damages are contrary by their express terms and as they may be applied to this defendant in this case, to the Constitution of the United States and the Georgia Constitution, and are therefore void inasmuch as said statutes deny the defendant equal protection of the laws (U.S. Constitution Amendment XIV; Georgia Constitution, Article 1, Section 1, Paragraph 2) by providing fewer protections for civil litigants than the criminal laws provide to persons

accused of violation of criminal statutes which provide for the imposition of monetary fines in that:

(1) Said statutes fail to define or provide advance notice of the prohibited behavior with reasonable clarity whereas criminal defendants are entitled to such notice.

(2) Said statutes fail to specify the upper limit of damages to be imposed whereas criminal statutes imposing similar penalties must be limited.

(3) Said statutes allow imposition of such damages upon the "preponderance of the evidence" rather than the "beyond a reasonable doubt" standard applied in similar criminal cases.

(4) Said statutes contemplate the imposition of such damages against civil litigants who have been compelled to give evidence against themselves under the Georgia Civil Practice Act, whereas criminal defendants in similar cases cannot be so compelled.

ELEVENTH DEFENSE

The statutes of the state of Georgia which authorize the imposition of aggravated, exemplary or punitive damages are contrary, by their express terms and as they may be applied to this defendant in this case, to the Constitution of the United States and the Georgia Constitution, and are therefore void inasmuch as said statutes allow for the imposition of an excessive fine (U. S. Constitution Amendments XVIII and XIV; Georgia Constitution, Article 1, Section 1, Paragraph 17).

WHEREFORE, having added the above amendments to its defenses, this defendant prays:

(a) That the Plaintiff's Complaint be dismissed and for judgment in this defendant's favor and against the plaintiff, with all costs cast against the plaintiff;

(b) In the event that a judgment is entered in favor of the plaintiff against this defendant, then this defendant is entitled to total indemnity against Metro Ambulance Services, Inc.;

(c) That there be a trial by jury composed of twelve (12) persons;

(d) For such other relief as may be deemed just and equitable by the Court.

LONG, WEINBERG, ANSLEY & WHEELER

By /s/ MEADE BURNS
Meade Burns, Attorney at Law, P.C.
State Bar of Georgia No. 097000

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IN THE STATE COURT OF COBB COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY, Plaintiff, vs. HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, Individually and d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES; METRO AMBULANCE SERVICES, INC., Defendants.	CIVIL ACTION NO. 87A-17816-4

MOTION TO DISMISS, OR IN THE ALTERNATIVE, TO STRIKE PLAINTIFF'S CLAIM FOR EXEMPLARY DAMAGES

[Filed July 7, 1988]

Comes now HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA, d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES, a defendant in the above-styled action and respectfully moves this Court pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 9-11-7(b)(2) to dismiss the plaintiff's claims of exemplary damages, or in the alternative, pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 9-11-12(f) to strike the plaintiff's claim for

exemplary damages, showing the Court the reasons more fully in the defendant's brief attached hereto.

LONG, WEINBERG, ANSLEY & WHEELER
By /s/ MEADE BURNS
Meade Burns, Attorney at Law, P.C.,
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IN THE STATE OF COBB COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY,

Plaintiff,

vs.

HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, Individually and d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES; METRO AMBULANCE SERVICES, INC.,

Defendants.

CIVIL ACTION
NO. 87A-17816-4

BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF DEFENDANT'S MOTION TO DISMISS, OR IN THE ALTERNATIVE, TO STRIKE THE EXEMPLARY DAMAGES CLAIMED

[Filed July 7, 1988]

[Brief Abbreviated]

Punitive damages are repugnant to the Georgia Constitution and the Constitution of the United States of America in that they deprive the defendant of life, liberty and property without due process of the law (U.S. Const. Amend. XIV, Ga.Const. Art. 1, §1, ¶1); they deny the defendant the equal protection of the laws (U.S. Const. Amend. XIV, Ga.Const. Art. 1, §1 ¶2); and they violate the excessive fines clauses of the Georgia and United States Constitution (U.S. Const. Amend. VIII, Ga. Const. Art. 1, §1, ¶17).

* * *

[The Brief then argues each of the foregoing constitutional provisions, citing decisions of this Court, among others.]

CONCLUSION

THEREFORE, any award of punitive damages that may be available in the present case, clearly violates constitutional prohibitions against excessive fines, they deny due process, and they deny the equal protection of the laws of the United States and the state of Georgia. The defendant respectfully requests that this Court dismiss or strike the claim for punitive damages in the present action.

Respectfully Submitted:

LONG, WEINBERG, ANSLEY & WHEELER

BY: /s/ MEADE BURNS
Meade Burns, Attorney at Law, P.C.
State Bar of Georgia No. 097000

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IN THE STATE COURT OF COBB COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY,

Plaintiff,

vs.

HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, Individually and d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES; METRO AMBULANCE SERVICES, INC.,

Defendants.

CIVIL ACTION
NO. 87A-17816-4

ORDER

[Filed August 11, 1988]

The above-styled case having come before this Court on Motions to Strike or Dismiss Plaintiff's Claim for Exemplary Damages by Defendant Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, Georgia, d/b/a Gwinnett Ambulance Services and Defendant Metro Ambulance Services, Inc., and Plaintiff's and Defendant Metro Ambulance Services, Inc.'s Motions in Limine, and after an oral hearing of said Motions, this Court, after examining the briefs, citations of authority and the file as a whole, finds as follows:

1.

Colonial Pipeline Co. v. Brown, 258 Ga. 115 (1988) is not authority which compels this Court to strike or dismiss the Plaintiff's claim for exemplary damages. The

issue of exemplary damages claimed in this case is an appropriate one for the jury to consider.

2.

The Defendants' remaining constitutional arguments to strike or dismiss the Plaintiff's claim for exemplary damages are without merit.

THEREFORE, it is ORDERED that both of the Defendants' Motions to Strike or Dismiss Plaintiff's Claim for Exemplary Damages are hereby DENIED.

In addition, those portions of the Plaintiff's and the Defendant Metro Ambulance Services, Inc.'s Motions in Limine which are not agreed to or withdrawn are hereby DENIED.

SO ORDERED, this 10th day of August, 1988.

/s/ A. HARRIS ADAMS
A. Harris Adams, Judge
State Court of Cobb County

MOTION FOR DIRECTED VERDICT

[Made September 23, 1988]

MR. BURNS: . . .

May it please the Court, on behalf of the Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, I would move for the direction of a verdict on punitive damages, in that the evidence adduced during the course of the trial would admit of no verdict other than a verdict for the Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, and more specifically the evidence brought forward during the course of this trial established that the negligence, if any, on the part of the Hospital Authority did not rise to that level of negligence as would warrant a finding of punitive damages against the Hospital Authority, and I would further move and suggest to the Court that the Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County is entitled to a direction of a verdict in its favor with respect to punitive damages because the Constitutional defenses — not only the Constitutional defenses of the State of Georgia, but the Constitutional defense of the United States of America as submitted to the Court previously in briefs, and read and ruled on by the Court — and I would like to adopt and incorporate those at this time — my brief in support of that motion to dismiss punitive damages, if that is agreeable with the Court — (T. 632-633)

JURY INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING PUNITIVE DAMAGES

[Given September 23, 1988]

Members of the Jury, where the law requires one party to pay damages to another, it seeks to see that the damages awarded are fair as to both parties.

If you believe from a preponderance of the evidence that the Plaintiff is entitled to recover, you should award to the Plaintiff such sums as you believe are reasonable and just in this case.

Now, the Plaintiff seeks nominal damages, and exemplary damages only in this case. If the injury is small, or mitigating circumstances are strong, only nominal damages are given. What would be a proper amount of nominal damages is a question for you to decide under all the facts and circumstances of this case.

The legal definition of nominal damages is a "small amount."

Now, in a tort action in which there are aggravating circumstances, either in the act or the intention, the Jury may give additional damages to deter the wrongdoer from repeating the trespass.

Punitive, that is aggravated damages, may be authorized when the circumstances of the wrong are such as to show an entire want of care, and an indifference to the consequences.

The measure of such damages is your enlightened conscience as an impartial Juror, and unless you find that the Plaintiff would be entitled to recover nominal damages as against a particular Defendant, you could not award exemplary damages against that Defendant.

Now, it is not essential to recover for punitive damages that the person inflicting the damages was guilty of willful and intentional misconduct. It is sufficient that the

act be done under such circumstances as evinces an entire want of care and conscious indifference to consequences.

Such conduct may constitute aggravating circumstances in the act which would authorize a Jury to give additional damages, that are also known as exemplary damages.

Now, the law does not permit you in arriving at your verdict to be governed by sympathy or prejudice. You may not, therefore, base your verdict in this case upon sympathy for or prejudice against either party.

On the contrary, your verdict must be supported by the evidence, based on the law as given to you in charge by this Court. (T. 743-745)

OBJECTIONS TO JURY INSTRUCTIONS ON PUNITIVE DAMAGES

[Made September 23, 1988]

MR. BURNS: May it please the Court, on behalf of my client we would take exception to the Court's charge to the Jury, or charges to the Jury on exemplary or punitive damages for the same reasons as expressed in our motion to dismiss punitive damages, the Constitutional reasons, and as we expressed on our motion for summary — directed verdict on Constitutional grounds, so we take exception to those charges on punitive damages, for those reasons.

THE COURT: I acknowledge the exceptions, but abide by my rulings, and for the same grounds, and upon the same reasons that I have set forth in my order and previous expressions denying the motion for directed verdict. (T.760-761)

IN THE STATE COURT OF COBB COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

R. STANFORD JONES,
Administrator of the
Estate of WILLIAM
HAROLD O'KELLEY,

Plaintiff,

vs.

HOSPITAL AUTHORITY
OF GWINNETT COUNTY,
Individually and d.b.a.
GWINNETT AMBULANCE
SERVICES; METRO
AMBULANCE SERVICES,
INC.,

Defendants.

CIVIL ACTION
NO. 87A-17816-4

MOTION OF DEFENDANT, THE HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA, FOR JUDGMENT NOTWITHSTANDING THE VERDICT OR, IN THE ALTERNATIVE, FOR A NEW TRIAL ON ALL ISSUES AND FOR REMITTITUR OF THE VERDICT

[Filed October 7, 1988]

Comes now Defendant The Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, Georgia, (hereinafter "Defendant Hospital Authority") and moves pursuant to O.C.G.A. §9-11-50(b) and pursuant to the Uniform State Court Rules to set aside the verdict rendered on September 23, 1988, in favor of Plaintiff and the Judgment entered thereon on September 27, 1988, and to have judgment entered in favor of Defendant Hospital Authority dismissing with prejudice Plaintiff's Complaint as to the claim for punitive damages in accordance with Defendant's Motion for Directed Verdict made at the close of all the evidence. As

grounds for this Motion, Defendant Hospital Authority shows:

1.

This action was tried to a jury beginning on September 19, 1988, and the jury returned its verdict in favor of Plaintiff for Five Thousand One Dollars ($5,001.00) in nominal damages jointly against both defendants, Five Thousand Dollars ($5,000.00) in punitive damages against Defendant Metro Ambulance Services, Inc. and One Million Three Hundred Thousand Dollars ($1,300,000.00) in punitive damages against this Defendant on September 23, 1988. Judgment on said verdict was entered on September 27, 1988.

2.

The close of all the evidence, Defendant Hospital Authority moved for a directed verdict in its favor on the grounds that the uncontradicted evidence showed that there were no aggravating circumstances in either the act or the intention of the Defendant Hospital Authority upon which to base an award of punitive damages and that the evidence introduced, with all reasonable deductions, demanded a verdict in favor of Defendant Hospital Authority.

3.

In addition, Defendant moved for a directed verdict in its favor on the grounds that the statutes of Georgia regarding punitive damages are repugnant to the Constitution of the State of Georgia and the Constitution of the United States of America in that they deprive the Defendant of life, liberty and property without due process of the law, deny the defendant equal protection of the law, and violate the excessive fines clauses of said Constitutions.

4.

Defendant's Motion for Directed Verdict at the close of all the evidence was denied by the Court.

IN THE ALTERNATIVE, Defendant moves to set aside the said verdict and judgment entered thereon and to order a new trial of all issues. As grounds, Defendant shows:

1.

The verdict and judgment are contrary to the great weight of evidence in that there was no negligent act or omission of the Defendant Hospital Authority upon which to base a claim for nominal damages.

2.

That the verdict and judgment are contrary to the great weight of evidence in that there were no aggravating circumstances in either the act or the intention of the Defendant Hospital Authority upon which to base a claim for punitive damages.

3.

The verdict and judgment are contrary to law in that the award of punitive damages is repugnant to the Constitution of the State of Georgia and the Constitution of the United States of America in that it deprives the Defendant of life, liberty and property without due process of the law, denies the Defendant equal protection under the laws, and violates the excessive fines clauses of the above-stated constitutions.

4.

The verdict is clearly so excessive as to be inconsistent with the great weight of evidence in the case.

5.

The verdict is so excessive that it clearly demonstrates gross mistake, prejudice or bias on the part of the jury thereby permitting the trial court to order a new trial or reduce the amount of damages awarded against this Defendant.

In support of this Motion Defendant submits herewith its brief containing argument and citation of authorities. Defendant reserves the right to add to and supplement the grounds for this Motion for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict or, in the Alternative, for a New Trial as to all issues and for Remittitur, upon receipt of the transcript of the trial record. Uniform State Court Rule 41.1 allows the trial court to hear motions for new trial immediately after filing and prior to the preparation of the transcript of proceedings.

WHEREFORE, Defendant Hospital Authority prays that its Motion be granted and that the verdict and judgment thereon in Plaintiff's favor be set aside and that judgment be entered in favor of Defendant dismissing with prejudice Plaintiff's Complaint as to the claim for punitive damages or, in the alternative, that a new trial as to all issues be ordered, or that the Court reduce the amount of punitive damages awarded against Defendant and that Defendant have such other and further relief as is just and proper.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED this 7th day of October, 1988.

LONG, WEINBERG, ANSLEY & WHEELER

By /s/ MEADE BURNS

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State Bar of Georgia No. 097000

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THE STATE COURT OF COBB COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY,

Plaintiff,

vs.

HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, Individually and d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES; METRO AMBULANCE SERVICES, INC.,

Defendants.

CIVIL ACTION
NO. 87A-17816-4

ORDER

[Filed January 19, 1989]

The above-styled case having come before this Court on Motion of the Defendant, The Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict on the Issue of Punitive Damages, and, in the Alternative, for a New Trial on All Issues and for Remittitur of the Verdict, and the Plaintiff having responded thereto, after an oral hearing on said motions and after considering the briefs of the parties, citations of authority and the entire record, this Court finds as follows:

The Defendant argues that the Court erred in failing to Direct a Verdict for this Defendant as to the Plaintiff's claim for punitive damages in that the Georgia statute which authorizes the imposition of punitive damages is unconstitutional and violates both the Constitution of the State of Georgia and the Constitution of the United States, in that it deprives the Defendant of life, liberty

and property without due process of law, denies the Defendant equal protection under the law, and violates the excessive fines clause of the Constitutions. The Defendant contends that denying this Motion was error and that the Defendant is entitled to Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict as to this claim.

* * *

[The court next reviews the decisions relied upon by the Hospital Authority, including decisions of this Court.]

In conclusion, after reviewing Defendant's arguments and the response by the Plaintiff, Defendant's Motions for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict, Motion for New Trial and for Remittitur of the Verdict are all hereby DENIED.

So ordered, this 19th day of January, 1989.

/s/ A. HARRIS ADAMS
A. Harris Adams, Judge
State Court of Cobb County

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF
THE STATE OF GEORGIA

THE HOSPITAL AUTHORITY OF GWINNETT COUNTY, GEORGIA, Individually and d.b.a. GWINNETT AMBULANCE SERVICES, Appellant, vs. R. STANFORD JONES, Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM HAROLD O'KELLEY, Appellee.	CASE NO. 46956

ENUMERATION OF ERRORS

[Filed May 19, 1989]

I.

The evidence was insufficient to support a verdict against The Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, Georgia, awarding punitive damages, and, therefore, the trial court erred in refusing to grant a Motion for a Directed Verdict and denying a Motion for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict or, in the Alternative, for a New Trial on the issue of Punitive Damages and for Remittitur.

II.

The verdict and judgment awarding $1,300,000.00 in punitive damages against The Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, Georgia, is excessive as a matter of law and the trial court erred in refusing to grant a Motion for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict or, in the Alterna-

tive, for a New Trial on the issue of Punitive Damages and for Remittitur.

III.

The punitive damage statute of the state of Georgia, O.C.G.A. § 51-12-5, is unconstitutional by its express terms and as it was applied to The Hospital Authority of Gwinnett County, Georgia, in this case, and the verdict and judgment for punitive damages against The Hospital Authority is unconstitutional and void inasmuch as the statute permits and the verdict and judgment constitute the imposition of an excessive fine and inasmuch as the statute and the verdict and judgment deny The Hospital Authority due process of the law and equal protection of the law. Therefore, the trial court erred in denying a Motion for Directed Verdict and a Motion for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict or, in the Alternative, for a New Trial on the issue of Punitive Damages and for Remittitur.

This 19th day of May, 1989.

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